

## River Gypsies of Bangladesh Speak to New Jersey Through Quilting

### - AP [Launches Appeal](#) for Education of Gypsy Children -

Oceanville, New Jersey: The River Gypsies of Bangladesh are struggling against illiteracy, obscurity and violence from greedy corporations that steal their sand. But at least they are telling their story to the world through an advocacy quilt.



**The River Gypsy Quilt on display at Noyes**

The River Gypsy Quilt is one of 17 quilts that went on display recently at the [Noyes Museum in New Jersey](#). This is first time the quilt has been shown in public since it was completed.

Meanwhile [Matthew Becker](#), a former Peace Fellow who volunteered with the Gypsies in 2012, has raised \$900 towards a new school for Gypsy children. The Advocacy Project (AP) is supporting Matt's initiative.

The River Gypsy Quilt is the latest to be produced by a AP partner organization and brings the number of quilts at AP to over 30. Those on display at Noyes reflect the many challenges that face AP partners, including [war rape in the DRC](#); [climate change and disability in Vietnam](#); [genital cutting in Kenya](#); and [uterine prolapse in Nepal](#).

Noyes is the fourth major gallery to display AP quilts, after the [United Nations \(2012\)](#), [Kean University \(2013\)](#) and the [Textile Museum](#) in Washington DC (2013). The Noyes exhibition can be viewed through photos [here](#) and will run until September.

Sara Gendlek, the Deputy Director at Noyes, said that the Museum honors art that is crafted by hand and was particularly interested because the quilts had come out of adversity: "People will walk by and say 'Oh - Pretty!' Then they go 'Wow - there's a deeper message here and we want to learn more.'"

The squares for The River Gypsy Quilt were embroidered by local craftswomen in Bangladesh under the supervision of [the Subornogram Foundation](#), an AP partner which represents the Gypsies. The squares were then brought to the US by AP and assembled by the [Sisters' Choice Quilting Guild](#) in Arlington, Virginia.

The message of The River Gypsy Quilt is less foreboding than other quilts on display. Most of its squares describe a life spent on boats and in harmony with nature. But [one square](#) shows River Gypsies being beaten for protesting against the illegal theft of sand by local corporations.

The scandal of sand-dredging was described [in blogs by Matthew Becker](#). Matt's successor, Chris Pinderhughes, was present in 2013 when Shahed Kayes, the founder of Subornogram, [was assaulted by sand-dredgers while traveling on the Meghna River](#). AP protested to the UN, but no-one has been arrested.

Several of the Virginia quilters said that they had first learned about the problems facing River Gypsies while putting the quilt together. "It has certainly made us think," said Beth Suddaby, who led the quilting team.

AP is not sending a Peace Fellow to Subornogram this summer because of security, but remains deeply committed to Mr Kayes and his work, particularly education. Gypsy children struggle to attend government schools, and Subornogram fills the gap by offering government-standard education at seven schools. These include a floating school (photo below), and the only school on Mayadip Island, which is at the center of the sand-dredging controversy.

Mr Kayes is seeking to buy land and build a larger school on Mayadip at a cost of \$8,000. Matt Becker has raised [\\$900 online](#) and AP has created a [new page on the AP website](#) to support the appeal.

Educating the Gypsy children may be the single best way to end the isolation of the River Gypsies, reward the artists in Bangladesh, and respond to the intimidation of the sand-dredgers. We hope you will be generous!



**Above: The quilt artists in Bangladesh, from left: Rabeya, Nadira, Hosneara, Mukta and Shahnaj**



**Below: The Sisters Choice quilters from Virginia, from left: Leslie Jo Waters, Cathy Eckbreth, Gail Wentzell, Beth Suddaby, Amy V. Loar and Debra Shetler with Peace fellows Chris Pinderhughes (front left) and Matthew Becker**



**This image, of River Gypsy children studying on a floating school, is taken from the quilt.**

- Donate to the [River Gypsy School Appeal](#)
- View the [Noyes Museum Quilt](#) Exhibition in photos
- View the [Bangladesh artists](#) of The River Gypsy Quilt
- View the [Sister's Choice Quilters](#) assembling the River Gypsy quilt